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Olive GardenŽ Pasta e Fagioli

It’s amazing how many lousy clones for this delicious chili-like soup from Olive Garden are floating around on the Web.

Some are shared on message boards, others are displayed on sites in a collection of “actual restaurant recipes” (yeah, right!).

But they all leave out obvious ingredients you can see, like the carrots, ground beef, or two kinds of beans. Others don’t get the pasta right — it’s obviously ditali pasta (short little tubes).

Then there's the recipe that really squeezed the seeds from my gourd — one that's floating around in MasterCook format that lists “Top Secret Recipes” as the source. But, wait a minute!

I've never before created a clone for this dish — not here on the site, and not in any book. So, after logging some time over a chopping block, an open flame, and a couple tasty glasses of Merlot, out popped this puppy. And this is the one, kitchen cloners!

If you want the taste of Pasta e Fagioli at home, this is the only recipe that will fool in a side-by-side taste test. Accept no other imitation imitation!

1 pound ground beef

1 small onion, diced (1 cup)

1 large carrot, julienned (1 cup) 3 stalks
celery, chopped (1 cup) 2 cloves garlic,
minced

2 14.5-ounce cans diced tomatoes 1 15-
ounce can red kidney beans (with liquid)
1 15-ounce can great northern beans
(with liquid) 1 15-ounce can tomato
sauce

1 12-ounce can V-8 juice

**1 tablespoon white
vinegar**

1 1/2 teaspoons salt

1 teaspoon oregano

1 teaspoon basil

1/2 teaspoon pepper

1/2 teaspoon thyme

1/2 pound (1/2 pkg.) ditali pasta 1.

Brown the ground beef in a large saucepan or pot over medium heat.

Drain off most of the fat.

2. Add onion, carrot, celery and garlic and sauté for 10 minutes.

3. Add remaining ingredients, except pasta, and simmer for 1 hour.

4. About 50 minutes into simmer time, cook the pasta in 1 1/2 to 2

quarts of boiling water over high heat. Cook for 10 minutes or just until pasta is al dente, or slightly tough. Drain.

5. Add the pasta to the large pot of soup. Simmer for 5-10 minutes and serve.

Serves 8.